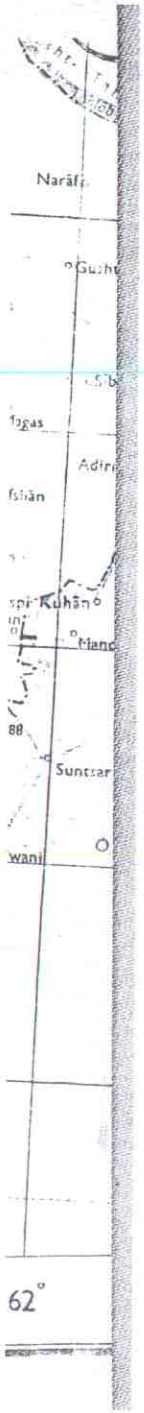
fear that he would cry up a holy war." Dies's critics on the left went much further, however, not hesitating to convict him of fascist proclivities. Certainly the small-town Texas lawyer felt more comfortable in the company of Legionnaires than of professors, and the people who cheered him at rallies where he said things like "God gave us America and the Marxists shall not take it away" did not represent the intellectual cream of American life. But if Dies could be convicted because he had spoken at a luncheon that Fritz Kuhn happened to attend; if it was proof of his fascism that he was praised by Joseph P. Kamp of the far-right Constitutional Educational League and had dealings with Merwin K. Hart of the far-right New York State Economic Council—both of whom in turn had dealings with a still shabbier class of patriots—then by a like syllogism the editors of *The Nation* and of most other liberal organs could without further ado be hung as Communists. They argued that Dies must have a warm spot for William Dudley Pelley of North Carolina, head of the frankly Jew-hating Silver Shirts, because the Committee hadn't been able to track him down for questioning. But those whom Sidney Hook has called our "totalitarian liberals" had for years been far more closely attached to Earl Browder—and Pelley's influence was hardly impressive beside that of the Communist leader's in his lionized days. Moreover, although Dies's claim to credit for the arrest on charges of sedition of seventeen Christian Fronters in New York[1] was merely humorous, he had spoken much more harshly about Nazism and fascism than such liberals as *Nation* editor Freda Kirchwey had spoken about Communism. Even loyal readers of *The Nation*, who were prepared to believe anything ill of the Congressman, however weakly grounded, must have wished that the evidence of a link between Dies and Pelley was a little more palpable, a little less conjectural . . . and suddenly, for a few days in January 1940, it seemed that their case was made.

On January 22, during the Rules Committee's perfunctory

[1] The subsequent acquittal of the Christian Fronters was used by champions of the Committee in Congress to show that Dies had been right not to bother about them.

hearings on the continuance of the Dies Committee, Congressman Frank E. Hook of Michigan, a ferocious opponent of Dies, announced that he possessed written evidence of an "understanding between Dies and Pelley." When Representative Starnes started to defend his absent chairman, Representative Cox of Georgia remarked, "He doesn't need any defense before this committee." Hook thereupon inserted in the record of the House excerpts from what he maintained were letters between Pelley and David Mayne, the Silver Shirt leader's representative in Washington. *The Nation* had evidently been given access to the evidence at the same time as Hook or even earlier, for its issue dated January 27 carried an article by assistant editor James Wechsler, who had outgrown the American Student Union and the Young Communist League, which contained portions of the alleged Pelley-Mayne correspondence. Written on stationery of "The Silver Shirt Legion of America," one of these letters referred to "the understanding that Dies will not go out of his way to embarrass us—True—Fr. Coughlin —George or the Legion." In another letter, Pelley explained that a booklet he had issued in 1939 attacking the Dies Committee for harassing Gentile patriots instead of finding out "whether there is any Jewish conspiracy against constitutional forms of government" was intended only "to create the general impression that there existed between Dies and myself a personal 'gripe' sufficient to keep us apart from any form of cooperation . . . and was actually intended . . . to offset any rumors —in the event of suspicion—that he and I through mutual contacts had an understanding." Wechsler delighted in the scoop. But within a week these letters were shown to have been part of a hoax; it was a case of the desire to believe sending respectable men headlong into a slough of gullibility.

The innocent strategist behind the anti-Dies plot was Gardner Jackson, legislative representative of Labor's Non-Partisan League, an indefatigable worker for the underdog, whose name had naturally found its way onto many of J. B. Matthews's lists. Jackson was no Communist, and he had earned, by earnest works, a reputation for integrity as well as for courage and good will, but the thought of the Dies Committee clouded his



nobler faculties. He set a young associate named Harold Weisberg on the track of Dies. Assisted by Drew Pearson, Weisberg made contact with Mayne, who obligingly turned over the letters—to put Jackson "out on a limb," he later explained. Weisberg paid Mayne $105 and promised him a job in the Department of Agriculture.

With this material in hand, Jackson held a dinner party in mid-January for a few New Deal Congressmen to discuss how the letters might be used against Dies as the debate over continuing his Committee approached. Most of Gardner's guests were skeptical of the letters, and advised against using them, but Hook, a New Dealer whose mind could not keep apace of his temper, was . . . yes, hooked. As Pelley himself would later interpret the event to reporters, "I think he was just played for a sucker, don't you?" Mayne, who had previously been employed by the Committee to try to get Pelley to testify, had set as a condition of his handing over the letters that he would be notified before they were used; Weisberg so notified him, whereupon, according to some reports, Mayne notified the Committee counsel, Rhea Whitley. The Committee, it was later suggested by mortified liberals, had actually hired private detectives to sell false documents to Congressmen who craved them. This was never proven, but whatever the Committee staff's part in the initial plotting of this comedy-mystery, they rubbed their hands at the denouement. Mayne unresistingly admitted his forgery at once to Dies's young friend, Committee investigator Robert Stripling, who from then on took credit for breaking the case. Mayne was eventually brought to trial for his prank; he pleaded guilty and received a suspended sentence.

Hook's response, as it dawned upon him that he had been most grievously taken in, was that of the captain who attempts to sustain his sinking ship by blustering back at the hurricane:

> If there is any question of forgery then the Dies Committee is guilty of conspiracy to bribe a person to commit forgery to cover up their past nefarious acts. It is typical Dies Committee smearing to befog the real issue of collaboration with those closely connected with the Christian Front . . . There was only one real effort to overthrow the government of the United States, and that came from below the Mason-Dixon line. It looks as if another effort is coming from that source.

Hook made much of an affidavit from Mayne to the effect that the signatures on the letters were those of Pelley, and he refused to apologize for entering them into the Record—though he relented to the extent of agreeing to withdraw them, a concession that the defenders of Dies, overjoyed at the way the case had developed, would not accept without an accompanying apology. Hook continued to rant, demanding that the Department of Justice investigate the "charges of forgery, collusion and conspiracy."

At an open meeting of the Committee on February 6, where Mayne testified that he had simply traced the signatures, leaving out the second "e" in Pelley on purpose, Hook, according to an eye-witness account, stood over him "trembling with rage" and "roared his questions until he was requested to stand at the other end of the Committee table." Only then did the choleric gentleman from Michigan finally apologize—"If the House feels its integrity impugned or if any member is aggrieved, I do not hesitate to apologize"—and the forgeries were expunged. A year later he would still be exorcising his embarrassment, blaming everything on "investigators who cooperate and collaborate with men to mislead and entrap a Member of Congress for the purpose of smearing him before the public because he had the courage of his convictions . . ." *The Nation* dealt with the unfortunate fate of its scoop by making light of the letters that had seemed so dramatic to its editors a week or two before. The emphasis on the forgeries, they now protested, was designed to obfuscate the evidence of Dies's hobnobbing with Christian Fronters. Martin Dies, still at home in Orange, Texas, recovering from influenza and a ruptured appendix, was all at once, and most strangely, martyr as well as prosecutor and judge.[2]

[2] In his autobiography Dies claims that the incident of the letters was but one of repeated low efforts to destroy his work. These included, he writes, a New Deal conspiracy to slander him as an income tax evader, an attempt to kidnap his son Bobby, and a plot, which he only narrowly escaped, to entrap him with a pretty girl in her room at the Mayflower Hotel.

* NOTE FOR p 92 in "NOTES" SECTION READS: "HAROLD WEISBERG: HE HAS LATELY REAPPEARED AS THE AUTHOR OF SEVERAL BOOKS ATTACKING THE CREDIBILITY OF THE WARREN REPORT. SEE WHITEWASH (NEW YORK, 1965)."

THESE ARE THE ONLY REFERENCES TO H.W. IN THE BOOK.